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National Development Project for

Social Services in Finland



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Finland is reforming social services

Finland has launched a programme to reform its social services during 2003–2007. The purpose is to revamp the entire comprehensive service system. Along with the national programme to reform health care, this programme is one of the most important projects of the present government. A key issue is to improve the availability and quality of services.

Social services in Finland

Finland is a Nordic welfare state where the public sector bears the main responsibility for the provision of social services. Child day care and old age care are the largest component areas of social services. In addition, the public sector is responsible for providing such services as:

- child guidance and family counselling, and child welfare
- services and assistance for people with disabilities and special care for mentally handicapped people
- social work, rehabilitative work and services for substance abusers
- last-resort income support

The roughly 450 municipalities in Finland are responsible for the provision of social services. These local authorities finance 70 percent of the expenditure on the provision of social welfare and health care services out of the municipal tax revenue. Central government transfers to local government cover about a fifth of the expenditure and the remainder, less than ten percent of the municipal funding for social welfare and health care, is financed from client fees. The

municipalities may provide the services themselves, in cooperation with other municipalities or by purchasing them from private service providers.

Challenges to social services

The National Development Project for Social Services is a response to changes in the operating environment of the social welfare sector. The biggest challenge is to secure the availability of services throughout the whole country. Key elements affecting the sector include the reduced fertility rate, population ageing, internal migration and internationalisation, together with unstable prospects for the public economy. The Finnish system of social services was mainly built up during the 1980s, and the structures and operations of the system are now being reformed to meet the present needs.

Goals of the National Development Project for Social Services

Securing access to social services

The aim is to improve clients' access to social services because at present this access varies in different parts of the country. In order to achieve this goal, cooperation between the local authorities in the provision of services is being increased and the legislation on the access to services is being specified.

Reforming service structures and operations

The project aims at reforming the municipal service structures and operations. Services are being modernised to be more timely, flexible and client-oriented. More effective methods for the provision of services are being sought and the introduction of new working practices and operational models is being pro-

moted. Cooperation between different authorities at national and local levels is being intensified and closer cooperation between the local authorities, the third sector and private service providers is being promoted.

Securing staff skills and availability

The aim is to secure the availability of social service staff and staff skills. In order to reach this goal, the provisions on the educational qualifications required of staff are under revision and further education and training will be made mandatory. In addition, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health issues national recommendations on the duties and sufficient number of staff.

Ensuring social service funding

Central government transfers to local government for the operating costs of social welfare and health care will be increased to help local authorities carry out the project goals. The increase will be about EUR 400 million over the course of the project. In addition, local authorities may apply for a government grant for the financing of various development projects. Over EUR 80 million will be granted for municipal development projects during the project.

Securing the long-term development of the sector

Preparations for the Welfare 2015 programme are underway. The aim of the programme is to produce a long-term national strategy for social services.

Projects and sub-projects

The National Development Project for Social Services consists of four main projects and over 20 sub-projects:

Project 1:*Securing access to services and service quality*

1. Right to the assessment of need for service

Project 2:*Development of the service structure and operations*

INCREASING COOPERATION

2. Securing services by increasing regional cooperation
3. Strengthening the development, education and research work and concentrating it in regional client service units

REVISING WORKING PRACTICES

4. Case management and service coordination in social welfare
5. Programme for good practices in social welfare
6. Creating a nationwide system of emergency social services
7. Promoting the use of information technology in social services

SERVICES FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

8. Improving the financial standing of families with children
9. Making room for children and families in society
10. Early intervention
11. Developing early childhood education and care and strengthening parental inclusion
12. Developing the activities of family centres
13. Preventing intimate partner violence and domestic violence
14. Development project for child welfare

SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

15. Introducing the service voucher in home services
16. Development projects for home services and home care
17. Developing informal care
18. Developing the long-term care of older people

SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSERS

19. Developing services for persons with disabilities
20. Developing services for substance abusers

Project 3:

Staff recruitment, skills and improvement of working conditions

21. Securing the professional skills of social service staff
22. Securing the sufficiency and availability of social service staff
23. Towards a new staff strategy by reforming the service structure and operations

Project 4:

Welfare 2015 programme

Organisation of the National Development Project for Social Services

The Management Group for securing the future of social welfare and health care leads the project and approves the implementation plan for the project.

The National Coordination Group is responsible for carrying out the project in practice. The regional steering groups and key interest groups at the national level are represented in the coordination group.

Nine Regional Steering Groups are responsible for the progress and launching of the project in their areas. The municipal social welfare and health care leadership and other key interest groups are represented in the regional steering groups.

The organisation of the National Development Project for Social Services

